

Bob Weir and Ratdog Band Biography Fall 2004

There may never have been a band that has evolved more dramatically than RatDog. It began as a laid-back blues ensemble in 1996, but now in 2004 it has become a snarling rock band that has a fabulous jazz trio at its heart. Of course, all those forms are simply different facets of Bob Weir's unruly musical personality.

Even when his first band, the Grateful Dead, was playing close to 100 shows yearly, Weir needed other outlets, and he developed a solo career that began with albums like "Ace" and "Heaven Help the Fool" and continued through his sidebands "Kingfish" and "Bobby and the Midnites." He then settled into a special duo partnership with the distinguished bassist Rob Wasserman.

As their music evolved, they reached out into musical realms that required more players. RatDog was born, and began to grow. First came the drummer, Jay Lane, one of the Bay Area's best, a member of the Freaky Executives and the Uptones. He introduced to RatDog the incredibly gifted jazz/blues/rock pianist, Jeff Chimenti. Guitarist Mark Karan came to Weir's notice in the summer of 1998 when they played together in The Other Ones, and he proved far too good to let go. The Lane/Chimenti jazz pipeline produced another addition to RatDog, the fine Bay Area saxophonist Kenny Brooks, a New England Conservatory of Music graduate and a long-time member of the Charlie Hunter Quartet.

Finally, early in 2003 Rob Wasserman decided to concentrate on his various personal projects (his duo relationship with Weir endures), and RatDog went sniffin' for a new bassist, finding him in Bay Area veteran Robin Sylvester. The London native has been a Bay Area fixture for more than 20 years, and is best known for his long-time close association with the legendary (and Rock and Roll Hall of Fame member) saxophonist Steve Douglas, which put Robin in recording and performing situations with Phil Spector, Bob Dylan, the Beach Boys, and Ry Cooder. Robin is a vital addition to a band that's ready to explode.

RatDog's music represents Weir's complete repertoire, from blues like "Good Morning Little Schoolgirl" and "Little Red Rooster" to the psychedelic stylings of his Grateful Dead classics like "Playing in the Band," "The Other One," and "Throwing Stones," to his own Dead rockers like "Cassidy," "One More Saturday Night," and "Sugar Magnolia," to some of his solo material, like "Josephine" and "Bombs Away." The 2000 release of the band's first studio album, "Evening Moods," added a bevy of hot tunes to the song list, including "Odessa," "Bury Me Standing," "Two Djinn," and "Ashes and Glass." Of late, he's also included a number of Jerry Garcia tunes in the mix, including Dead classics like "St. Stephen," "Terrapin," and "Touch of Grey."

2001 saw the release of "Live at Roseland," a double-CD collection from a Portland, Oregon show, and a big favorite among Dead Heads.

Hybrid Recordings released "Weir Here," a two-CD career retrospective of Bob's complete oeuvre (one disc studio, one live) in 2004
Bob Weir and RatDog. It'll grab hold and not let you go.

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For art, go to www.dead.net/hotline_info/dogpix. There you will find pictures of both the band and Bob individually. CLICK on the picture to open it, and it will download at a very acceptable 300 dpi.